



Frontera hires directors to 'keep growth going'

By David Mitchell, The Packer

(Web Editor's note: The following article is updated, extended coverage of a story we first posted on Oct. 31).

(Nov. 4, 4:27 p.m.) Edinburg, Texas-based Frontera Produce Ltd. has named a veteran of the Lone Star State's produce industry to the newly created position of director of sales.

Chris Eddy, who spent the past 17 years in the McAllen, Texas, office of Duda Farm Fresh Foods Inc., joined Frontera Nov. 3.

"With Chris there he can handle the day-to-day sales and allow me to focus on other projects," said vice president of sales and logistics Ken Nabal, who works out of the company's Boca Raton, Fla., office. "By strengthening Edinburg, it's going to help the remote offices as well."

Frontera Produce also has offices in Miami and Dallas, and Nabal said the company is looking to expand into Nogales, Ariz., and possibly California.

Eddy, who had been Duda's sales manager in McAllen since 2005, said he has been friends with Nabal and Frontera president and chief executive officer Will Steele for years.

"When you listen to Will and Ken talk about the company, it's hard not to get excited," Eddy said. "It's like they were saying, 'We're having fun playing this game. Why don't you come over?' It was a great opportunity, but it was a tough decision. I spent a lot of time at Duda."

A spokeswoman for Duda could not be reached for comment.

Eddy said his early challenges will include familiarizing himself with the company and its product line. At Frontera he'll be selling some items, including tropical fruit, that he didn't handle at Duda.

Nabal said Frontera, which was founded in 1992, has been growing about 20% each year.

"We restructured the company a little more than a year ago," Nabal said. "We knew at some point we were going to need people like Chris Eddy and Mike Laws on board to keep that growth going."

Laws recently was named director of logistics for Frontera Fresh Logistics LLC, Naples, Fla. He spent the past 3½ years as general manager of East Coast operations for Seattle-based Universal Freight Forwarders and has 30 years experience in transportation.

Maria Vazquez, who had been an operations manager for Universal, has accepted a similar role with the new Frontera company.

Frontera Produce had launched a transportation division in January 2007 in an effort to minimize expenses after the company's freight costs topped \$12 million in 2006.

Nabal said Frontera hopes to improve service to existing customers by filling up trucks and getting them on the road faster. He said many shippers are looking for less-than-truckload solutions, in part because of demand for just-in-time deliveries.

"We could sell pallets, but we couldn't get trucks," Nabal said. "We need to eliminate that problem."

Laws said the business will use third-party trucks.

"The more volume we build, the more effective we can work with customers on backhaul loads and continuous dispatch," he said.

Nabal said the company also will offer refrigerated storage and forward distribution services.